

The article published by the U.S. Surgeon General in the Journal of the American Medical Association was challenged late in March in the same magazine by Dr. Joseph Berkson of the Mayo Clinic.

Doctor Blasts Report Linking Smoking, Cancer

By Pete Ellis

Staff Reporter

The current issue of the Journal of the American Medical Assn. is publishing a communication that charges Dr. Leroy E. Burney, surgeon general of the U. S. Public Health Service, with "inaccuracies" and "misrepresentations" in his report linking lung cancer with smoking.

The communication criticizing Dr. Burney was written by Dr. Joseph Berkson of the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn.

It deals with an article written by Dr. Burney and published in the AMA Journal last Nov. 28. A week later, Dr. John W. Talbott, editor of the Journal, in an editorial said that Dr. Burney's conclusions were based on "insufficient evidence."

The editorial brought an inquiry to the AMA Journal from Dr. David D. Rutstein of the Harvard University Medical School, who said he was shocked at Dr. Talbott's editorial. The Journal this week is printing Dr. Berkson's correspondence to answer Dr. Rutstein.

In general, the article (Burney's) is characterized by an imprecision of language and thought that renders inaccurate almost every point it deals with," Dr. Berkson's communication says. "In particular, it contains some frank errors of omission and commission which are misleading with regard to the basic questions at issue."

Dr. Burney's article had quoted Dr. Berkson's analysis of statistics on lung cancer and smoking. Dr. Berkson charges that parts of Dr. Burney's presentation "can easily mislead the reader."

The Mayo doctor also takes issue with the surgeon general's comments that "nonsmoking women have about the same lung cancer death rate as nonsmoking men." He said this "almost certainly is not true."

"The death rate for men is greater than that for women, not only for cancer of the lung but for cancer of almost every organ that is comparable in the two sexes and for virtually every noncancerous disease also."

Dr. Berkson accused Dr. Burney of "an even less explicable lapse" in his "failure" to cite the experiments performed by the Public Health Service itself in the laboratory of the pathologist, Dr. H. L. Stewart. In these experiments administration of cigarette smoke to mice failed to produce lung cancer.

Secretary of Health and Welfare Arthur S. Flemming was quoted in press dispatches of last Nov. 28 of approving distribution to the AMA article by Dr. Burney to the press.

Dr. Berkson said, "The article is presented as a statement of the Public Health Service." He also criticized this, and said he doubted if Dr. Stewart and Dr. Harold F. Dorn, chief statistician for the National Institutes of Health, had reviewed the statement.

"I cannot believe that Dorn reviewed or edited the statement of the surgeon general before its publication, nor can I believe that Stewart did, considering that his own work was not cited, leaving aside other inaccuracies that I cannot believe him to have approved."

Dr. Berkson's communication said that "if the Public Health Service believes that tobacco smoke contains chemical carcinogens which cause lung cancer, then the first task of its responsible scientists is to isolate these substances in 'pure culture' and to identify their chemical structure."

Dr. Berkson said that about 85 million dollars has been appropriated for the National Cancer Institute, "with about 20 million dollars allocated specifically for research in chemotherapy."

He said that as far as he knew, no monies had been set aside for "carrying out the first steps to be taken to realize the discovery of an important cause of lung cancer."

"As I have pointed out," he said, "the prospective studies show more excess deaths among the smokers from other causes than from lung cancer, and these other causes are distributed among all classes of disease."

The current issue of the AMA Journal will be distributed this weekend.

JOURNAL

Winston-Salem,

North Carolina

February 26, 1960

THE NEW YORK TIMES

New York, New York

February 28, 1960

BURNEY DISPUTED ON SMOKING LINK

Mayo Clinic Scientist Says

He Doubts Tobacco Is

Main Cancer Cause

Special to The New York Times.

CHICAGO, Feb. 27.—The conclusion of Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney that the weight of evidence implicates smoking as the "principal" cause of the increased rate of lung cancer

has been challenged by a Mayo Clinic scientist. He said more "serious investigation" was needed.

Writing in The Journal of the American Medical Association, Dr. Joseph Berkson of Rochester, Minn., replied to an article by Dr. Burney in the Journal last November.

In his article, Dr. Burney said that "unless the use of tobacco can be made safe, the individual person's risk of lung cancer can best be reduced by the elimination of smoking."

The Burney article, Dr. Berkson wrote, "has been widely interpreted in the editorial press as an authoritative pronouncement of the Public Health Service and as a definitive opinion on the scientific issues involved in that controversial subject. I beg to present some reasons for doubting each of these valuations."

Burney Challenged

Dr. Berkson first disputed Dr. Burney's statement that he, Dr. Berkson, had noted "not only an association between smoking and lung cancer, but also to a wide variety of other diseases."

Dr. Berkson said he did not merely note this association of smoking with other diseases,

but had emphasized that "only about 14 per cent of the 'excess deaths' reflected in the higher rate of smokers compared to nonsmokers were due to lung cancer, while 86 per cent were due to causes other than lung cancer."

Dr. Berkson said that Dr. Burney's article, in general, "is characterized by an imprecision of language and thought that renders inaccurate almost every important point it deals with."

He singled out Dr. Burney's assertion that "nonsmoking women have about the same as the 'principal' cause of the lung cancer rate as nonsmoking men."

"This, almost certainly, is not true," Dr. Berkson said. "The death rate for men is greater than that of women, not only for cancer of the lung but for cancer of almost every organ that is comparable in the two sexes and for virtually every noncancerous disease also."

Higher Mortality Rate

"The higher general mortality of the male than the female is characteristic of the entire animal kingdom. It is usually related by biologists to the presence of two chromosomes in the cell of the female and only one in the male, not to smoking."

"If the Public Health Service believes that tobacco smoke contains chemicals which cause lung cancer, then the first task of its responsible scientists is to isolate these substances and identify their chemical structure."

Dr. Berkson closed by quoting a British researcher, Sir Ronald Fisher, who has been critical of the analysis of English data on smoking and lung cancer and who said:

"The question seems to be a serious one; when is serious investigation going to begin?" Dr. Berkson added: "His question is timely even now."